

Participation and Nationality

At only 16 years old, **Achieng Ajulu-Bushell** is set to become the first ever black female to represent Great Britain in a swimming discipline. Ajulu-Bushell has made the difficult choice to switch allegiance from Kenya to GB in order to achieve her personal best as a competitor at the London 2012 Games. Ajulu-Bushell credits her decision to switch nations as “the hardest I’ve ever had to make”.

Ajulu-Bushell, who has not lived in Kenya since she was 10, is the daughter of an English academic and a Kenyan political refugee. She has spent much of her life in England, and credits her decision to transfer representation from Kenyan to GB status partly to her strong friendship with the prodigious diving superstar and world champion Tom Daley, with whom she studies.

Her ‘defection’ from one national camp to another is very recent, as she represented Kenya at the 2009 World Championships in Rome. As she is a somewhat popular figure in the Kenyan teenage and women’s magazines press, her decision may be viewed with sadness, but, hopefully, support.

Strong Family Role Models

It appears that Ajulu-Bushell’s decisions to make tough decisions and to take decisive action backed up by self belief may well have been affected by the strong personalities of the parents that raised her.

No doubt Ajulu-Bushell does not have to look far for strong and positive role models. As a young

athlete meeting the heavy demands of rigorous training and competition on a world stage, such as resource is undeniably very valuable for her. Her father is Rok Ajulu, a politics professor formerly in exile, and her stepmother, Lindiwe Sisulu, is the South African Defence Minister. Her birth mother, Helen Bushell, was a lecturer in international development.

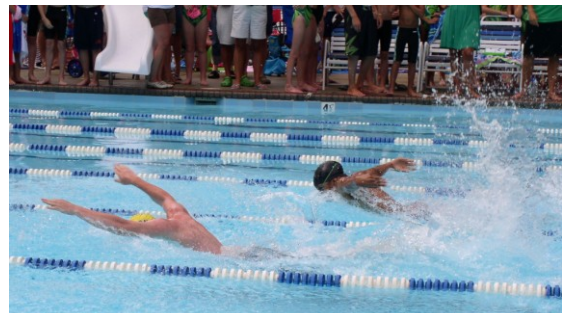


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Becoming A Young Role Model

Her mother has been quick to comment on her decision, also spreading some light on the personality of her daughter who has clearly inherited the strength of her parents and who appears to have the capacity to serve as a positive role model herself.

“She does not stop being Kenyan...She will always be tremendously grateful for what Kenya has given her. She has sacrificed an automatic place at the Commonwealth Games [and the] Olympic Games. But she gambled all of that for something she really believes in. She was in the Kenyan system very early, at the African Youth Championships at 12 in Senegal. We weren’t aware of it at the time but she had chosen her sporting nationality. She is very aware of her ability to be a role model as an African and a black athlete.”

Bushell partly credits her decision to move both herself and her daughter back to the UK as Kenya simply did not have the swimming facilities required for her daughter to achieve her potential. She is now based at Plymouth College, where she swims on a scholarship. The coaches remember their initial meetings with her as being: "...13 going on 21. She's very confident, very mature, nothing arrogant about her. It was her personality and intent about what she wanted to do in the sport that got her [the place]."

The Rules for Switching National Representation

Ajulu-Bushell has not competed at international level for the past year, so meets the regulatory conditions of FINA (the governing body for swimming) in terms of being able to swim for GB from the summer of 2010 onwards.

Under Olympic rules, an athlete must give three years notice of intention to change nation, meaning that Ajulu-Bushell had some quick decisions to make if London 2012 was a target for her. This explains her quick move from one camp to another.

Clearly Ajulu-Bushell is proud of both her Kenyan and Great British heritage, and will be as proud to represent GB as she was to represent Kenya. In so doing, she is aiming not only for a place on the Olympic podium, but also for a place in the history books.

START THE DISCUSSION

- Anthony Lee Ervin, the first man of African-American extraction to race for the United States and the first to win an Olympic swimming title (2000, 50m freestyle) stated of his mixed African-American and white Jewish descent: "I feel the labels, in a way, belittle who I am. I'm proud to be black. I'm proud of my Jewish heritage. I'm proud of everything that makes me who I am. All of that makes me a unique person, just like anyone else." Do you share his views, or do you feel that our national and ethnic status define us?

- There is much made of the concept that the Olympics are not political, yet the permission of an athlete to compete is determined completely by the nation state under which they live. A nation state is defined by its' politically-defined borders, so how, and indeed why, might the claim that Olympics are not political be made?

- What might this case study potentially tell us about the effect of role models?

Should you be able to compete for more than one nation?

FIND OUT MORE

British Swimming:

<http://www.swimming.org/britishswimming/>

GB Swimming Team London 2012:

<http://www.london2012.com/photos/2009/05/gb-swimming-team-63060.php>

FINA: <http://www.fina.org/>

CREDITS

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